

AROUND THE CORPS IN BRIEF

Gunny re-enlists 20 feet under water

HAWAII KAI, OAHU, Hawaii — Scuba diving and the Marine Corps are the two biggest passions of one staff noncommissioned officer who went a few extra meters underwater to prove his dedication to the Corps.

Gunnery Sgt. Daniel E. Blanchard, company gunnery sergeant for Kilo Co., 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, re-enlisted at a depth of 20 feet with more than 20 members of his command, as well as his son Thomas, during an underwater re-enlistment ceremony Feb. 11 at Hanauma Bay.

“The ceremony worked out really well,” said Blanchard after surfacing. “I felt that after 20 years of service, I should do something spectacular to mark this occasion, and as far as I know, I don’t think anyone has done this sort of thing before.”

With waterproofed re-enlistment documents in hand, Capt. Rush Filson, commanding officer of Kilo Co., led Blanchard through his re-enlistment ceremony. Though the words were almost impossible to hear and all anyone could see were bubbles emitting from their mouths, the two were able to understand each other well enough to complete the ceremony.

“It is an honor and a privilege to retain one of the finest infantry staff noncommissioned officers I’ve had the pleasure of working with in my time in the Marine Corps,” said Filson. “It is very fortunate [for Blanchard] to enjoy his service and to re-enlist in a unique environment like this.”

Soon to be selected for first sergeant, Blanchard will be moving on to Camp Pendleton, Calif., and according to his wife, Saudra, he will be missed by many of the Marines in his unit.

22nd MEU (SOC) sets sail for deployment

ABOARD THE USS WASP — The Feb. 19 departure of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) from the eastern U.S. seaboard marks the 19th time the unit has sailed forth into harm’s way.

The MEU personnel are embarked aboard the USS Wasp, the USS Shreveport and USS Whidbey Island as part of Expeditionary Strike Group 2 that also includes the cruisers Leyte Gulf and Yorktown, destroyer McFaul, and attack submarine Connecticut.

The 22nd MEU (SOC)’s long and difficult journey to reach this point began last August when the unit assumed operational control of its major subordinate elements: Battalion Landing Team 1st Bn., 6th Marines, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 (Reinforced), and MEU Service Support Group 22.

“This is as good a MEU as has ever pushed off the coast of North Carolina and headed east,” said Col. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., commanding officer of the 22nd MEU (SOC). “We’re poised and ready to go out and strike at the enemy’s heart.”

Most of the Marines boarded their three amphibious ships at Norfolk, Va., while rolling stock and equipment were loaded via the port at Morehead City, N.C., and across Camp Lejeune’s Onslow Beach. Prior to its Marines leaving, BLT 1/6 and the MEU’s other elements hosted departure briefs for the Marines and sailors’ families.

“It’s with great honor and humility that I deploy with these men,” said Lt. Col. Asad A. Khan, commanding officer of BLT 1/6, speaking to a group of Marines and their families. “No unit is better trained and ready to go, so take this brief time and spend it with each other.”

Marines help harvest sugar cane crop

ISHIKAWA, Okinawa, Japan — Marines of Ground Sensor Platoon, 3rd Intelligence Battalion, III Marine Expeditionary Force, volunteered to help mentally handicapped students from the Reimei No Sato school harvest some of last year’s sugar cane crop Feb. 5 in Ishikawa City.

The Marines teamed up with the students to help elderly Okinawan farmers gather their crops. The farmers had already cut down the sugar cane stalks and left small bundles scattered throughout their fields.

With the farmers getting older, the job of moving the bundles was just too much for them to do alone. For the Marines though, it was a piece of cake.

“We’re just trying to help out, but we have a lot of fun in the process,” said Pfc. Daniel Rheume, ground sensor surveillance operator.

The Marines met the students at the school, where together they boarded two buses to bring them from field to field.

When they reached the fields, they were tasked with retrieving the small bundles and stacking them into larger piles approximately four feet tall in each of the five fields they visited. They piled the cane stalks on top of large wire cables that had been laid on the ground beforehand.

When the Marines and students finished piling the sugar cane, the farmers used the cables to bind the stacks. The cane stalks were then lifted onto trucks using a crane. The trucks later took the cane stalks away to be processed into sugar.


MP company prepares for Iraq at combat town

MCB CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — A military police company from 2nd Force Service Support Group recently spent three days at the base’s combat town, learning the basics of MOUT, and applying what they learned in realistic practical-application situations.

“I was extremely impressed and surprised by how quickly my Marines learned,” Sgt. Donnie Hoskins, squad leader, 2nd Platoon, A Company, 2nd Military Police Battalion, later said. “They were right on the money.”

Second Lt. Jason Bryant, platoon commander, 3rd Platoon, said the

Tiny bubbles ...



Sgt. Joseph A. Lee

OAHU, Hawaii — Gunnery Sgt. Daniel Blanchard (right) swims around the underwater formation of 3/3’s Kilo Company Marines, shaking each one of their hands, to thank them for participating in his unique re-enlistment ceremony -- a memorable moment in Blanchard’s career.

Marines learned and applied lessons including gaining a foothold, room clearing techniques for two-, three- and four-man teams, covering assigned areas, security posture in a building, communicating in a MOUT (military operations in urban terrain) environment, hasty vehicle check-points, urban patrolling, and cordon and search, among other basic principles of MOUT. They also learned to react to sniper fire, bomb threats and bomb detonations.

This training differs from training received before the company deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom because their future deployments and missions may not be the same.

“Last time the focus of our mission was convoy security,” Bryant said. “On possible deployments back to Iraq, these Marines are now more likely to be operating in an urban environment.”

Military police can be tasked with anything on deployment, according to Cpl. Scott George, squad leader, 3rd Platoon, and an instructor during the training exercise.

During OIF, the battalion spent the majority of its time guarding convoys, but they could be doing something completely different during their future deployments.

‘Warhorses’ saddle up for Iraqi deployment

MCAS FUTENMA, Okinawa, Japan — For the second time within a year, the personnel of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron-465, currently on the Unit Deployment Program to Okinawa from MCAS Miramar, are getting ready to deploy to Iraq sometime in this month.

From January to July 2003, the Marines of HMH-465 supported Operation Iraqi Freedom. Shortly

after their return, they began preparing to come to Okinawa on UDP, only to receive notice that they would soon be going back to Iraq.

Prior to their departure, the squadron faced many obstacles that had to be overcome. One of the most significant one was with personnel changes. Nearly one-third of the squadron’s Marines left due to permanent-change-of-station or end-of-service. This meant the new Marines who replaced them had to be trained.

“We started in September with two combined arms exercises, a weapons tactics course, three tactical exercises, followed by mountain training,” said Lt. Col. Pete Zoretic, commanding officer for HMH-465. “Once we arrived in Okinawa, we focused on night training because many missions we flew during OIF took place during the night.”

Another obstacle for the squadron was losing three detachments of Marines and equipment to the 11th, 15th and 31st Marine Expeditionary Units.

A few weeks before the squadron stepped on Air Force planes headed for Iraq with their equipment, the maintenance crew played a key role in making sure the squadron was ready to deploy. They meticulously tested the planes to make sure they were up to standards.

Squadron participates in multilateral exercise

KORAT ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE BASE, Thailand — Various units from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni began arriving here to participate in Exercise Cope Tiger recently. Marines from Marine Aircraft Group 12, Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 12, Marine Wing Support Squadron 171, Marine Air Control Squadron 4, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 and Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 4 will be participating in the annual exercise which affords Marines the opportunity to train with pilots from the Royal Thai Air Force and the Republic of Singapore Air Force.

Cope Tiger, which began Feb. 17, is a multilateral training exercise hosted by the RTAF. The training is a tool to foster inter-service and international relations, said Maj. William D. Shannon, MAG-12 detachment officer-in-charge. It also allows Marines from Iwakuni to strengthen bonds between the governments of the United States, Singapore and Thailand.

The actual exercise will be conducted until Saturday. Marines from the various units are excited to have the opportunity to train with the service members of Thailand and Singapore.

“I am glad to have the opportunity to represent the Marine Corps with air traffic control during this exercise,” said Gunnery Sgt. Daniel F. Karakas, MACS-4 air traffic control tower liaison. “Thailand is a beautiful country with friendly people.”

Fire, training chiefs exchange ideas

MCAS MIRAMAR, Calif. — The quarterly Marine Corps Fire Chiefs and Training Chiefs Conference was held at the Officers’ Club here Feb. 9-10.

The conference included civilian

fire personnel representing Marine Corps fire stations in California, Arizona, Nevada and Iwakuni, Japan. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss numerous topics and issues with the intent of improving fire-fighting capabilities within their respective areas of responsibility, according to Miramar Fire Chief Jerry Sack.

One of the subjects discussed during the conference was the Cedar Fire that burned more than 19,000 acres here, most of which is on East Miramar.

The chiefs and training officers took a tour of some of the burned out areas on East Miramar and neighboring Scripps Ranch.

Their next stop along the tour was Fire Stations 61 and 62 to view new equipment and multi-million dollar anti-terrorism/force protection upgrades the stations will soon undergo.

Sack said some of the upgrades include the installation of new sprinkler systems and retrofitting upgrades to the main structure of the building.

“The Miramar fire station is one of the first Marine Corps fire stations to be upgraded to meet the AT/FP requirements,” Sack said.

The conference also included the introduction of paramedic ambulance services being conducted by the Marine fire departments. The Marine Corps is the first branch of service to have their civilian fire department assume paramedic ambulance service for all the Marine bases, according Sack.

February celebrates healthy teeth

MCAS IWAKUNI, Japan — Families gathered at the Branch Medical Clinic Feb. 7, from 8 a.m. - 1 p.m., so that their children could get a free dental check-up during the annual National Children’s Dental Health Month.

“The American Dental Association has named February as Kid’s Month,” said Navy Lt. Jeff Bleile, Dental Clinic dental officer.

The American Dental Association held the first national observance of Children’s Dental Health Day on Feb. 8, 1949. Over the years, it has extended to a month-long celebration.

“We’re here to promote healthy smiles and also encourage parents to instill good dental habits with their children,” added Bleile.

“I think it’s a great thing for the children to get a free check-up,” said Toni P. Keating, mother of three children who got check-ups. All the activities they have are for the children, which make this a special event. The games also help occupy their time while they are waiting.

The children receiving the free check-up at the clinic ranged from two to 14 years old.

“Two years is a good age for parents to start bringing their children in for a dental check-up,” said Navy Lt. Nathan E. Gelder, Dental Clinic dental officer. “At that age there shouldn’t be any problems, regarding their teeth.”

Compiled by the MCRD Parris Island Public Affairs Office

Ready to fight ...



Gunnery Sgt. Keith A. Milk

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — A Navy loadmaster from Assault Craft Unit 4 watches as another Landing Craft Air Cushioned (LCAC) speeds off Camp Lejeune’s Onslow Beach with a load of personnel and equipment bound for the USS WASP laying off shore. The 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) boarded the amphibious ships USS Wasp, WhidbeyY Island and Shreveport for a deployment to the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf regions.